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Refugees rise, says Kennedy

By Charles Claffey
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WASHINGTON — Sen. Edward M. Kennedy yesterday said the current escalation of the Vietnam war has uprooted as many as 500,000 more refugees.

Kennedy, chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees, said the new statistics are "all very familiar — only the latest chapter in a seemingly endless story of human suffering in Vietnam."

There are now more than 10 million war victims in Vietnam, he said.

Kennedy noted that the recently revealed memorandum on Vietnam by Henry Kissinger included the refugee problem under the heading of "lesser issues," and quoted from it:

"Every agency, except the military assistance command in Vietnam, and the joint chiefs of staff, agrees that the available data on war damage to the civilian population is inadequate . . . the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) concluded that even under the most generous interpretation of the available data . . . it must be admitted that the rural hamlets are taking a tremendous beating."

Kennedy said that in spite of the memorandum's recommendation that the problem receive "attention and analysis" the problem of war victims remains a "lesser issue."

"Inevitably," Kennedy said, "the situation of civilians in Vietnam is taking second place to the political issues at stake — and the interests of those who have much to lose, or to gain, by the outcome of the battle."

But the people of Quang Tri, An Loc, Kontum and surrounding towns and hamlets also have interests, he said.

"For many, it is mere survival. And so, as governments and negotiators posture and bicker and threaten and ignore their responsibilities for peace and the lives of millions, a regional crisis of people builds and builds — in South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam as well.

Kennedy said that by every possible measure the issue of war victims in Indochina is given less priority today than at any time since 1965.

"This would be bad enough if we were only dealing with the aftermath of war — if we had the peace long promised the American people. But each day of war is adding heavily to the human toll and putting more and more strain on existing relief programs."

No Excuse For Secrecy On Vietnam

The Senate's secret vote in an extraordinary four-hour closed session devoted to a 1969 study of the Vietnam war leads the public to suspect a widespread desire to avoid responsibility for the disastrous U.S. policy in Indochina. Since the closed session was called to decide on Senator Mike Gravel's request to make public the secret multi-agency analysis of the war, the Senate's failure to announce any result of the locked-doors session can only be taken to mean a decision to keep the three-year-old memorandum secret.

Judging by excerpts from the 1969 document already published in the press and summarized by Senator Gravel, President Nixon was counseled by the Central Intelligence Agency and other civilian advisers at the beginning of his term against resuming the bombing of North Vietnam. Now that the savage bombing has been resumed in greater volume than ever without any apparent military effect, what purpose can be served by keeping the 1969 study secret other than to avoid embarrassment to Mr. Nixon and to those members of Congress who have supported or remained silent on his bankrupt and barbarous war policy?

Another sign of congressional unwillingness to pry out the facts on the war was the vote in the House last week against a resolution by Representative Bella S. Abzug calling on the Administration to give the legislators details on bomb runs, tons dropped and costs and personnel involved in U.S. bombing and shelling in Indochina. Are most of the lawmakers afraid to have, or to give the public, a full accounting of the frightful cost of the war, with all that this

signifies in terms of congressional as well as Administration slowness to recognize that American lives and treasure have been profligately expended in a military venture with no value to real American interests?

Even as the two houses of Congress were voting for continued secrecy on Vietnam, Teamster Union leader Harold J. Gibbons, who recently visited Hanoi along with two other labor leaders, was telling the *Post-Dispatch* that Mr. Nixon was misrepresenting the North Vietnamese negotiating position as relayed to him by the labor delegation. Contrary to Mr. Nixon's implied claims, Hanoi is not demanding a Communist takeover of the Saigon government.

Still another facet of secrecy and resulting deception is the Administration's emphasis on the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces while it conceals and disguises the increase in air, naval and marine strength, with all that this means for a continuing toll of American lives and a rise in the number of prisoners, to say nothing of the ordeal of death and suffering being visited upon South and North Vietnam.

As was shown by the publication of the Pentagon Papers — which was accomplished, incidentally, without the aid of Congress (except for Senator Gravel) and over the objections of the Administration—the public reacts negatively against this hideous war when it is given the facts. What is needed now is not further secrecy to avoid embarrassment but still fuller disclosure so that the public can make an informed judgment on the war at a time when citizens can best make their voices heard — through the ballot box.